LATE OCTOBER

Poems

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After the Rain, A Tree

A tree filled with sun after a night of rain,
and the wind is moving through –
arteries and veins of dark branches
with jagged light cuts and from them spreading capillaries
of yellow sun-glare,
and there is a dim atmosphere
of rain scented air.
One has heard of a tree house, but this tree is itself a house,
its living roof subtly rocking, quaking;
a tortoise shell of sketched light patterns on the sand
is like a tiled floor,
and rain drops are littering through the rafters
very quietly.

The tree is breathing like a huge chest filling,
and its speaking voice is in the air around,
its singing voice
is in the lifting of the leaves and smaller branches,
the softly brushed, cool, water-shimmering,
rain-pattering leaves,
and its voice, too, is in the stillness up above and around
in which there is the wind sound, and the sound of birds,
their archaic and still mysterious songs without words.

The Early Thaw

Ice encrusted on the branch of the apple tree
melting in the sun

first thaw of late winter,
earliest edge of spring

thaw-steam in sun mist
in the distance,
and the trees are wreathed in a fine film of light

Early this morning still dark
as I left to walk out,
a flaking skin of ice skimmed up from the porch's wooden steps
as I walk down them

the hollow sound of my steps

Two Summer Afternoons, Warm and Still

When you descended
through the leaves
active bright stirring
and bright silence

something suddenly known

a ginger ale cloud of light floss
in the still warmth
in the steeped air
in the tilted cube of sunlight
athwart the empty space in the yard
near the corner
spiral points floating
abundance
so empty
fathomless depth of light

Above all, sky depth
blue, still, filled with
a more, a different light

Depths of memory
of a day so far in the past
when I was a child

watching, listening

Early Morning Rain and Wind

Bronze light above of the black cleft of the hill,
green outline through the mountain's fissure,
wind so steady through the oncoming rain –
weighted grass that drags at my boot as I step through
walking toward the sun

where is the sun? and why not yet?

Leaves gold and burnt orange dull and ragged,
trees slashed through with pitchforks of the
heavy rain last night
still dripping, the wind-dented and
raked-through tree tops,
still leaves hanging, eaten through with the cold –

the rain pouring down the window all night long,
the wind pushing hard against the window pane
shaking the tree limbs down,
and I found them scattered across the driveway in
the morning as I stepped out
pulling my collar up around my neck,
pulling my cap down

Sun earliest edge within clouds like the dim light in
embers,
clouds of charcoal
and the black tree limbs are stiff in the wind

sun struggling, parting its wings of light through the
coal bright smolder dust of dark clouds

morning wind, I am watching
morning wind, with rain slash
rain not yet over
more rain graining the new light breaking through

air all around wet bright,
chill wind, rain morning storm

all through the air, all through my eyes,
my seeing, my face

By the Roadside at the Edge of Town

A splinter is there
inside the green of the hill,
and the blue day

light shard for the eye, and the soul is
up above somewhere
around in the brightness, the warm waver of air,
benzene fumes of light

We are here watching looking seeing –
I have somehow been drawn forth by this,
but where are we, and what? –

blade of light through the day
makes a cut through time

And the road runs on
through the fields,
past the burning globes of the green hills,
the rippling wheat of the green corn showered through
with sun

And the road is nearly white, so dry –
above, the cirrus clouds so thin and high seem to flake off
the belled depths of the sky –

and here at my foot no shadow can be seen,
gray dusty hot pebbles and green
dandelion sprays,
and off a ways there
the slight blue shine of the road tar

A river of warm dry air flows through the gulley –
the bushes scarcely show it,
but inside the day's silent burn and rustle of heat

there is something still and there is something moving

The Old Park in Late October

Autumn
bones of trees

and closing roots in earth
hands
few hands, but
many fingers

the open secret of rain, the rain
dark brown the earth,
light brown the woods
and with rained-on gold

Gray clouds in the windy sky

Sudden blue then –
the clearing and then pouring sun right through
all at once slightly warm
but then cold again

Thin bright sun of autumn in the cold basin of rain water
with forsythia yellow leaves, red and amber leaves,
and gold leaves
with green blushes along their stems

Cold water so clear
the open secrets of rain

water never quite still with wind across it and the sun in a corner
and reflections –
a hand here and there a face

Spring Day

Sun

branch

watching the loud wind-light

mid-day light river of steady air currents,
the trees' bend and tension

the uppermost branches just leaved with green
twisting as they lean

and it is early spring

bright agitation, here and now

no memory of anything at all

only this air and light, this being taken up into it
if only in feeling, breathing, sight –

and yet why say only, why suggest merely? –

maple trees with their light green twirling seeds
spiraling in handfuls out across the street

and there a white-haired lady, our neighbor,
steps out the side door of her house
and waves cheerfully
before disappearing into her back yard

To the Lake in the Evening

Leaf-silence and rain drip –
leaf-breath, tiny movements held in,
the woods holding quiet and still,
unfolding after a rain

The air's scent is cool on my skin,
I breathe the damp taste of earth
I shiver,
and my entire skin contracts with the chill

There is dampness and growing dark
at the edge of the trees,
then the yellow and mercurochrome bars of the sunset
fall slanting downward through leaves afloat in the streams
of dust-glare
that choir through the still twilight woods –
magnetized particles spin

In the forest of yellow light-smoke,
in radiant quivers the strands of light
smolder through forms, streaming onward,
golden floss adrift, burning

Then the sunset's blood clot of light erupts through the silence –
it sounds from beneath the charred outline of hills,
shaking and shaking the world

Then gradually, quickly, the light becomes silent with sundown

Through the unsettled agitation of leaves the breeze rises, then stops,
reawakens, subsides

The night is the darkness now, here and now,
the dark falls and falls through itself in the tense striations

What is expected?

The night is a network of points – of points falling and falling
and falling – points of time where space rushes to enter,
points of space out of which time is blaring,
a burning annunciation, a fire, a drumming from far down below
like the pounding of blood in my ear

Over the dark planes of space,
through the ripples of time, drunk
with the poppy of deep recollection,
I, listening, move outward to witness –

Over the lustrous oil of the starry night pond, adrift over the face
of the moon,
hearing the lunar voice of the sister,

The loved one, the lost and her children

Allurements

Unbearable spring

awakening restless
discordant
the mind

closing up the earthen the subterranean
passages
the ear listening
for another word

but there are only whispering suggestions
sparks struck off through the leaves
in the luminous aftermath of the rain

with a sharply painful breeze almost building to a wind
a storm coming and yet not quite

and I spread my light green jacket wide to catch more of it,
wind breaker the light jacket was always called –

gathering some of the breezes the jacket lifting a bit
and I am born along

I am 13 years old

Lightning in the late storm sky that night
lightning, and more lightning, that I could not understand –
empty the pages of the missal in the darkness of stone arches
and the blank page like dim sand at the bottom of a stream

something huge and yet intangible, and yet escaping farther
leaving then a mere fragment of the dark,

of the night itself, like a piece broken off

And then in the morning the bright breeze once again cool
so very tangible all around me
as I walked back from school
real and newly born these things finite infinite
in motion

and I, amid the allurements

On the Road Late

Autumn night of storm
so full of wind

the rain not yet

metal cages of the bare tree crowns
crevice-like against illuminated sky,
an ash blue slate

black branches reaching beetle legs
through the white face of the moon

past it, the obscure configurations of stars

the streaming graphite of rolling clouds to the east

In the depths of the street
are houses, bright windows,
baled-up hedges now bare –
closer they are tossing wicker baskets and waving
mandibles

blue gray sidewalk puddled with late rain
more cold rain not yet falling, but soon

and so I must hurry

Heaven and Earth

There and there
through the depths of the air –

greater depths reaching beyond, and nearer,
there are saturations of light
opening through ragged bright clouds,
their burning stains
glowing and bleeding through –
orange, rose, tangerine – gold –
before the sun nearly fallen
past the charred crust of a hill.

And streets at light-flood,
and then just after
tinted with amber and pink,
space itself burnt near a building's edge
itself light-frayed –
and the empty lot's bright shattered glass is tinted.

And yet just past the lot in the cold stiff grass
rained on, sodden through, through the night
there are numerous traces, small prints
of the hidden, these of the unnoticed world,
minute, essential, the hidden and the living still.

Return

Patchwork of the fallen leaves

half-rotted tapestries
of the trees
the image still visible

darkness, and light-stippled shadow

yet a light-crumb
steps its fingers through,
touches the floors of memory

and the sun lies buried far underneath,
it is asleep there

so certain of itself it can lie disguised as darkness

Powers of the building structures, the
gatherings

these the without-precedent

prepare their return

A Clear Day with Some Memories

A field in the North Country in September
and the air is warm still, light glinting
through the tree crowns

cabbage whites tumble as they rise
in a spill of sunlight, with mullein near

farther in the distance
the grass is yellow brown, light green,
and rolls in gradual waves
toward the border line

the sun is straight above, still almost hot

Hereabouts crevices of rock are cut through by the highway,
making canyons of thirty and forty feet
on either side the lanes

but here on the top wave of the great crest of the plateau,
you can see straight through to the horizon

The St. Lawrence lies beyond,
and the ancient battle grounds, burial grounds

Queen Anne's lace and dandelion near the sill of a rising slope

at the curbside there is crab grass and timothy
in the ditch by the hacked fence post

Summer Storm

Lightning rips down through the night's dress

soft hill breasts revealed –
a flickering bright moment

another eye-blink

and the light bulb filament of lightning sparks
wriggling down
at the core of the sky's bulb

then the bulb bursting –
sudden exploding loud

and the air's ice is cracking open,
ice avalanche
the whole ice tray of heaven dropped to the sky's floor –

rushing ice shards of the sudden rain sound,
and then rain

and hail
like dented white marbles

A sudden wind from the night held in cold storage behind this one
floods in and around

and we have to run inside,
        although we try to take bits of it with us

By the Small Creek

Noon of a bright silence –
        listen for
                what is beyond
        yet here

        water braiding sand
                weavings
under shadow-spotted gold –
one place sun-threaded
        near the bottom

        of an elusive location
                there
        not there

Sleep   then wake   listen for

        what is inside the day
                what is outside the day –
        many, many the days
                yet only one now

Well of attention to the stream's surface
        a depthless well, and yet of all depth

                single the moment,

however many

Current like a steady wind
blowing the water's ragged raying sunflower –
light-seeds streaming along its surface

swift and twisted boughs: the apple tree of glare

and filaments pulled toward the stream's edges
are like high bright grass in a wind

The blue spring day is a profusion of sun and clouds –
soon the new grain, the wheat, the apples, tomatoes
wicker baskets of peas, pears, and grapes:
the fields, the gardens opening without limit –

yet it's already shining here, near the bottom of amber, the sand dust

some like a grained dark linen,
the ancient text woven
of light sparkle

Noon of a bright silence, and yet clamor – therefore

see what is here
yet beyond

New Power

Morning light washes the white wall with
flakes of gold

There's a spackle of ice crystals
on the white-framed windowpane,
and I draw the drapes back wider to look outside

The sky is brightening from its deep lilac
and there are still a few points of stars

Dark blue rags of snow clouds float in a wash of copper
and green tints,
on the opposite street below
the rows of bare trees are dark brown, like burlap,
and somewhat burnt-looking

The street is the color of tin, at the intersection
car exhaust is like dry ice vapor

Some children are in a clump at the cross walk,
waiting on the crossing guard
who stands in her dark blue uniform in the middle of the street,
one arm stretched toward them, the other pointing at the waiting cars

And now as though of a sudden it is a cold and very clear morning
full of steam and frost clouds
and a blue tinted mist

that lingers in the recessed hollows of the open fields
to the west
And at the very vanishing point of the scene beyond
the sun is a yoke of orange light amid a white haze
that also webs the limbs of nearby trees
along the rows of buildings to the east – a public grade school
with its still empty playground
and next to that some green and dark brown wooden frame houses

There are platters of ice glare in the parking lot below my window,
a mist the color of lint drifts over the tire-scarred sandy mud
of the road that curves up into it

And now, suddenly, the white three-decker apartment house across
the street is startlingly bright

Now the vanishing point that leads past the horizon is really
the point of an arrival,
as the sun with its brighter and clear light is streaming
into everything

and there is awakening, and the city is revealed, and there is
new activity, and beauty

Cold Winter Day, Long Winter Night

Burning bright snow on the icy rooftops
of the hospital buildings across the way

pale white blue sky above and going on so high, so far,
no clouds at all –

there are the cars small in the distance
along the tin strip of road beyond –
the highway at the edge of town,
small sequins-like bits of metal passing,
a wind shield flashing occasionally

as I watch from my third story window

Dense chimney smoke slightly blue
from a sand-colored smokestack to the east
floating still in the air, suspended, motionless

The sun is high above,
there seem auras of finer harder light around it
that stream or shatter out through the sky, the entire day,
like sight lines through an ice cube

and the edges of my window are clouded like the center of an ice cube

There’s a sharpness to the grey limbs of the bare trees
snow-crusted
along this side of the street

they are still
in the still and frozen afternoon

Open the window now –
breathe the air, exhale your breath in vapor up into the sky

so high, so high, so dizzyingly high – where does it
ever end?
How can it be that I ever will? you wonder

Already the cold is stinging your face and hands,
reaching powerfully into the room;
the cat is looking at you, blinking its eyes, and
quickly leaves

Close the window then, and draw the dark green drapes;
how still the room seems to become – quiet, warm, and dim;
maybe make coffee or tea

Later in the long winter night as you sleep
there will be another light with its own fire inside of you

shining, burning

burning on and on

The New Season

Here on the garden path after a night of rain

it is early summer and the mid-June grass
has just lately gotten so thick and green,
a dark fir needle green in the early morning light

The sky still violet
with orange sparkling through the tree line
past the still quiet houses and the several blocks of
garden plots,
there is no one else around as yet

There's a web-like steamy mist in the wave-troughs of the lawn
down near the stand of apple trees,
already some heavy clusters of small apples in their spreading and
leaf-frothy boughs
lichen colored with frost –
some the early light lights a dim gold,
and yet some upward twisting boughs are shown in a moted
and pink light
that cuts across them

There's smoky white dew paint-streaked on the long grass near
the garage
over in the far corner in deep shade

Clouds of carbon purple with sun rays spacing them, streaming –

and the birds loud and rickety-noisy
fluttering in wet leaves,
some squirrels running through the bough darkness
of the maple tree
that canopies over the entire house

The dirt of the garden is very black –
grainy-muddy to the touch,
almost as cold as the rain water in this pail where I rinse my
fingers off,

a couple of thin brown twigs floating in it, and two green leaves

Distance

A bright sun over the field,
so strong the afternoon is heavy with the heat

it fills the air with an intense perfume –
grass and wild flowers,
the ground itself seems to breathe

there's a slight breeze in the distance near the hills
that lie vague in a webby haze –

insect hum – hoppers, cicadas –
opening its own space inside the silence

bright afternoon, intense sun at one o'clock

the day as though somehow of another time

In the distance there is a green farmhouse,
out beside a red barn –
a silver silo flashes in the light

There are two maple trees in the house's yard where it opens on the road

that arcs past –
in the light the road looks made of chalk

And now there are two young boys walking the dust shoulder –
the taller one pauses to look inside the red painted mail box
before they disappear running into the house's
screened-in porch

The grass is heavy and thick in the field with timothy, crab, and mullein
in troughs
beside the narrow dirt path

It will be a while before I get there –

there are a few small cumuli sun-burning, motionless,
in the bright blue sky

The Clothesline in the Back Yard

Clothes drying on the clothes line are blown in the wind like sails –
and white cumuli in the sky
piled high
drift all in one direction

The sun is over all –
the shingles of the house next door glitter in the brightness,
the cars parked in the driveway near the yard gleam –
their bright windshields, and their chrome

Two small children and their mother run out from behind the garage –
they had been out there seeing about the blackberries
that grow along the back fence there,
not ripe yet but they are likely turning red already,
a pale raspberry red and green-tinged still and hard
as buttons

The children run up near the driveway and into the back yard
flapping their hands and yelling,
one girl of about five and her slightly younger brother,
and their mother comes up after them

waving her arms, as though treading water – playful, herding them

Ignoring her, they start to snatch and bat at the towels
hanging white and pale yellow and pastel green in the sun

and then they jump up and, getting a running start, charge into
the bigger ones head first
and then pick out a still wet bed sheet and pretend to be two ghosts,
their mother laughing as they yell and make ghost gestures at her
pushing their way through it –
two slightly dark gray shapes, like wet stains come to life,
their small arms reaching through like anemones
as they get a bit tangled up in it,
and she comes around to get them free of the wet folds wrapped
around them

She has a light blue house dress on and she wipes her hands on
the front of it
and chases them around the sheet's other side,
clapping her hands at them as though to say
quick quick quick
and the three of them run laughing and disappear up the green
painted wooden steps
of the screened-in back porch next door,
and the wood frame door slams behind them with a clack

The breeze picks up again and the clothes all bob slightly and sway
and the white sheet
billows out again in a sudden strong gust –

towels and wash cloths, white briefs and pink slips, and white
and crème color bras,
black and brown socks,
and a couple of white and light green button-down shirts waving
empty sleeves

And the sun, beginning to get hot now, shines down
up past the white and high-piled clouds

Winter Afternoon, Intense Cold Sun

The sun over the snow fields blinds you if you try to look at it

the fields down slope are a vague bright haze

off where the ice-black river turns and twists on itself
its links of onyx and waxen gray
sun sparks struck in it, there
and there –

I can't see farther
the terrible cold has erased the light itself,
if light is something to see by

The afternoon is aching to be brought into the eye,
the eye aches in itself

in its opening, gaping, quickly narrowed and defensive squint

vision will not come forth to meet the winter afternoon

the valley frozen in its ice haze cannot rise out of the light
to take on palpable clear outline,

it burns to the touch of the sensitive attempt at sight

As the tongue tasting the shovel's metal
is torn and bleeds,
my eye bleeds its longing for vision out into the fields,
the white horizon, the not blue sky

The day recedes unseen behind the sun's freezing auras

Sunny Afternoon in the Field

With my eyes closed I lie in the hot sun
all afternoon

there is a slightest breeze through the grass
just now and then, yet fairly often

and I feel it on my face and through my hair
and across the back of my right hand –
my left is inside my pocket
where I can feel how the sun is heating even the fabric of my jeans,
and with eyes closed I see the sun –

bright hot dark, a kind of tiny seething of the eye itself, eye and eyelid
and my face as well,
as though all three were one
and they were baking, drying, hovered over,
and growing slightly separate from the rest of me –
the sun is taking up my eyes and my face into itself
yet leaving my body behind here

here where
turning and opening my eyes –
as though for a kind of first time,
like peeling a bandage off a wound

I see the shreds and shreds of grass blades matted, yet flickering,
in the heavy grassy ground-musty air
yellow with sunlight around them,

and I reach my fingers through them and I feel how
waxy cold they are

An Invitation, with Rain

If you come out to meet me
where the backyard and the garden and even the grape arbor
we have out here

are all full of the after-rain –
with ground mist too,
so veil-like wet
it almost seems a kind of dew up from the ground itself –

which is not just the water dripping from the bean vines

or trapped in the pea flowers' translucent mauve-veined white,
or in the central furrow of the zucchini leaf with its sequins
beads of rain,
the tomato leaf ragged-edged and fringed with
pinhead sized droplets

the walkway's grass slippery with a rain curtain

that mats it down and seems to make it a darker green still
so chill and wet to the touch –
although the dog will love to roll in it, wriggling on his back
and flexing,
seeming to smile in his playfulness before he gets up
and runs in loopy half-circles
a faint rain-mist all around him –

If you come out to see me where I've been sitting on the wet
wooden bench
painted green, hacked-up a bit, the blond under-wood
showing through,
but there are no initials carved

and there's still the drip of the rain
held in the serrated edges of the grape vine leaves over it,
the grapes themselves small and pale mist-green
with tough cane-like ruddy stems snaking in and through them –

I've been sitting here a while,
while most of the shower was caught by the thick vines
of the arbor over me,
but not all of it so that my old green work shirt is somewhat wet
and the front of my jeans along the thighs
and there are some water droplets on the back of my forearm
and wrist
and on the side of my face too,
but now I've wiped them off –

I am trying to make myself presentable to you –
when will you come to see me?
– to meet me in the wet grass,
in the back yard near the garden that is growing now so thick
and dense and strong –

to see me, to meet me in the cool chill shade – but not too chill –
of the grape arbor,
and to sit on the bench, even if it is a little wet and hacked-up
and old,
to sit beside me here –

how long will it be before you come and before
I can see you?

Unquiet Summer, the Late Evening

Unquiet of the summer evening
full of the many scents of the garden's earth
and the dark red roses near it
the deepest flower

long shadows from the edges of the garage
and the house roofs along the street are dark slate
in the last flood of orange bronze
the long slow sunset

the chimney's black
of the boarding house half a block away

to think of being an old man there alone in a small rented room,
an old woman alone

A moth now in the humid shade near the garage side
and another humming near the plum tree
the street between the houses

the empty street, no traffic here nor any passers by

The house is silent, there is no one around,
the windows are all dark –
one window curtain, yellow, with some designs on it
I can no longer see in the twilight

blows dented inward slightly in the breeze

At some point I will have to go inside and go to bed

after it's completely dark and the white moon is shining

Indian Summer

Wasps at the window
in the early fall

warm still air this afternoon,
a different light than summer –

champagne left in a glass overnight
warm, less active
stilled
but fragrant, sticky rich

windfalls litter the ground around the apple trees,
even the crabs are sweet now

in the later afternoon
bleary filaments of sunlight web the gold
and the red leaves of maple trees

Wasps hovering wavering around the open window,
here two stories up –
red amber bodies weaving in and through a tilted shelf of sunlight

As the light gets deeper, the fields beyond tinted, browning,
the sky shading toward violet
the cooler evening coming in,

they’re gone

Fields and Road at the Edge of Town

The hot day in the field with no breeze at all
and the sun is a center point of dense streaming light
its white rays reaching through the sky in faint cracks and streaks

the heat bearing down so heavy through the field,
the steady stifling heat of the air
like a kind of baking

but also like an increasing of the sky itself somehow, of the day itself,
and the thing which is somehow under the sky –
shall it be called the earth, and what is that? –

looking up into the sky I suddenly feel the ground underneath my step –
dusty, flat, steady, still –
what is another word for creation? is there any?

To the right a few hundred feet off, the slates are so blue

of the rooftops
of the apartment house by the bend in the road
and then too of the Christian meeting house across the street from it
– a luminous dark violet in the flashing froth of sunlight
that ripples across the waves of shingles –

for in the heat, objects in the distance seem
to waver and float
and to be washed with a kind of vertical grain –

cicadas are burning in their hiding spots, invisible

Fields flow down before me split through with bright zinc
of the long road
that goes downhill then up a steep grade at
the valley's other edge

The grass is a deep green, and pale-yellow brown strips
frame it with narrower
rectangles leading in their burning stillness toward the horizon and
its rising green hills,

far hills starkly sunlit with black knife marks in them
which are the scatterings of trees

Above that, near the white hem of sky, in the farthest distance
straight ahead, above
the mustard yellow of the burning bare hill crests

there are a few faint, still, loose brushings of white cumuli

The Infinite

The green curtain in my room is pulled aside
to let the afternoon breeze blow in,
the blond wood grain of the plain unvarnished sill
catches the light,
and there's a blue vase shaped like a pitcher to one
side of the window's ledge,
nothing in it but a metal ruler and one brown pencil;

The pulldown shade is half way up
and filled with a pulsing soft light of
luminous beige;
beyond it, past the curtain's edge,
the windy cool September afternoon – so bright –
the deep green hills, the trees with their leaves
still;

the summer has not really gone.

A Field in September

A field in September and the still humming air
scent of the warm ground in it and the grass,
and there is a light floss adrift across
the far corner of the field,
near the fallen-in green house,
sun flashing on a pane –

Inside there was a lemon tree once,
its softball large inedible fruit,
leathery pitted yet smooth skin, and its heavy acidic
fragrance;
around were the rows and ranks of flowers,
the common and the rare,
in the humid, still, sweet, expectant

air –
and one hears still a few last bees;
some way off there are groves of younger and older
maple trees –

light blear on the waving rippling breaking tree
crowns nearby,
there is a steady breeze –
towering cumuli drifting slowly through an intensely
blue sky

a stiff hollow stalk of long grass, pale yellow,
touching the back of my hand

and I’m getting ready to leave

It is hard to remember, still more to believe,
how huge the summer was

and now it is almost gone

Walking through the Sunset into the Night

Stepping stones of clouds
burnt on their undersides
press forward through the sky’s streams

the wind is pushing them
and the sun to the west is an open porthole
through which rough seas of gold are flooding in

slowly the burning deck is sinking
beneath waves of the distant hills

shipwreck of twilight earth
burnt off masts of trees still held up
in midst of a steady deepening
the final inclination into the astronomical,
its onyx and diamond world

Deep night and
now of a sudden the street is in thrall to the night's myth
lustrous the flute harmonics, although nearly silent –
tambor and tapping and soft rasps of the un-silent wood

the trees themselves,
gateway upon gateway to a beyond and a within,
custodial darkness of lore and obsession

branch shadows are darkened blood vessels,
crazed wind-throbbing
inside the mirror tain of the moon's sidewalk

Autumn Morning, Bright Thaw

The apple branch coated with bright ice
melting now in thaw –

the icy sleeve breaks away in scales
as I grasp it
and it numbs my hand
sharp in wet crumbling –
cool drops trickling down the heel of my palm and wrist

and I let the branch spring back

Smell the rotting windfalls
mashed down in long grass –
pulpy brown in an ice-coated shininess –

a quick note of fermenting, a cold cellar smell,
a kind of sweetish manure scent –
acrid earth must, and a hay sharpness
in bright freezing fresh cold morning air

breathe it in deeply now, and then breathe in still more –
taste the air, the wet ground, the rotted windfalls, the whole day

Tree trunk
so strong rough and twisting
up out of the paper-brown wild grass swirl
stiffened over on itself in crystalized frost

The air steams with chill
and the light is cold
and the sky is blue and radiant and wide
and a white sun shines far up high

All Souls Day

Late autumn, winter soon: the stripped bare woods
Glitter with cold rain; dragged amber, and dark green,
Are blackened, soaked. Mornings, thin runnels shine
With gelid, crinkled and frost-sparkling floods.

Sun-prismed mist, and complex solitudes,
Branch clutter on paths up to wind-silent stone;
And, turning back, the ways one might have gone
Are bright around you beneath light-combed clouds.

A Direction

Take up the rain
and take the sun

take up the soil
from the depths of earth
take up the leaves and flowers
and their hidden seeds

take up the golden hay the bright green corn

the grass so blue the sky so green
with yellow sunlight
with the charred sunset
the brighter yellow of the dandelion
white web and doily of the Queen Anne's lace
that floats like foam within the green field's waves

take up the shards of leaves burnt stained with frost
and dried flaking stiff
take up the ice skin filming the dark street's puddle
in an early and cold morning of frost steam

take up the street
fresh with a cold spring rain
spring blossoms littered on it from the sudden storm
take up the storm
and take the night through which it blows

layers of the night folded on themselves
a deeply woven rose

the crevices of its petals elusive to the touch

A Tree

Light contained in the netting
of the tree's dark
branches spreading

green and woven
all around the crowded space, the inner pathways

branching

and water too, and deeply

from the sky, sun-traversed

and from the depth
of captured earth, searching through the root systems,
the blind rumors

In spring the shearings of bright rain
and the arriving light,
in summer the siphoned tangent products
of a fierce geometric sun

How many forests
breaking upward in the wave
of a single tree?

chaotic and bright, the manifold of shore

singular uncountable currents

infinite tide

A Windowpane

White vines
of frost and leaves of frost
on the morning window pane
misty with fog-misted crystals

in which rainbows are also present,
elusive

mist flowers of your breath

the moon’s fingerprint in the deep blue of the white
morning

flowers tingling freeze your fingertips,
the numbness then
when you touch these flowers –

streaks of water
lengthen the moment
with a reconsideration
sought in for a dreamed reflection,
a hoped-for

– this breath itself
condensation of sun and moon
beyond this transparent barrier

which yet is not transparent

Rain

My feet are on the soft ground in the high wet
grass,
so cold and damp around my ankles
and yet so green already,
like the darker leaves of the plum tree at the back
yard’s edge or the rippling crowns of
the maple trees around

as the rain is falling down on me and I raise my face up to it and open both my hands like two stars
– my five fingers wide –
drops of cool rain on my chin and forehead

the siding of the garage looks a deeper brick red
in the droplet-grainy air
and the trash barrels near it are glossy with rain

Two dogs from the neighborhood cut through,
chasing each other,
seeming to enjoy the weather
as they shake their coats and toss their heads,
smiling as it were, and then rush off

What am I doing standing out here, you ask

Nothing except
breathing the cool air, feeling the wind working up
a bit,
seeing the gray-bright light and the rippled banks of
clouds shifting through themselves overhead,
bucket gray, damp cotton white;

touching the soaked-through earth of the garden,
gritty, sandy-crumbly between my fingers,
so black and musty-fragrant in my
nostrils –
it is waiting on its seeds –

touching now the deep down processes of earth
that I have right in my hands,
rain coming down on my neck
and even soaking my shirt back

I can almost feel leaf and flower and fruit preparing,
building, coming soon

and the rain then so green

Rain II

It was raining all afternoon –
        will it ever end?
                soon but not too soon,
and I must go out into it

Cool air now almost cold –
how old am I?
old enough but not too old

Bright airy needles
the surf spray of rain breaking on the shore
of my face

cool warm rain drops thick as pumpkin seeds,
silvery sails of rain moire, blowing free of their
winches,
whiplashing out against a tree's geodesic dome that
melts a bit, staggering

and the porch rail is gleaming with a quickened ice,
from the roof edge a diamond bit bores down spitting ice chips

then comes a stiff colder wind, so wonderful –
and now it is
wind-shattered glass shards of rain,
rain like burning ice –
cutting rain,
luminous, wild rain!

spreading forest fire of rain, avalanches of rain,
rain typhoon and rain hurricane,
williwaws of rain – I love it!

pummelings of the rain, and I face them

knives of wind-rain slashing,
cutting away at my face, my eyes

I can see
and I can breathe once again –
the scent of wet grass and mud,
tree leaves and bark so wet,
stirred up garden fulls of air
and every new flower and flowering bush,
every new thing to be grown,
every new thing to be seen and known –

I can smell and taste and feel it all

and I breathe it all in

I breathe it all in

I breathe it all in

Above and Below

Luminous yellow, translucent, of the vines
and more opaque the dark green
of the leaves

of the bean plants –

look,

but look again

now really look
and breathe, feel – now, here

tall bean plant and intricate peas with pale violet
flowers
skin so absolutely soft and thin
veins of an infinite lucidity and soft perfection

slight the flexing and almost a stiffening when you
touch them just lightly,
very lightly

delicate cling of the green
curling
tendrils

– should they even be touched by this wooden frame,
its crossed sticks, dry old dusty,
flakes of old bark adhering?

Above – the luminous torrent and the blue transit of days;
below – the twelve winds
and the suns of devastation

Dreaming

Night burns with paper dreams
inside the furnace sleep

shivering fire crowding the alembic

luminous flakes
hand prints soot blackened

touchings, testings –

within or without? –
thick flames of color
gather limbs once dark, burnt stick remnants lying now

glittering
fire ash of
web-like constellations display

the talismans that guard the inner room
in its dense luminous infinity,
that map the outer vacancy –
amid wide night drafts

– draftings –
cold, rumorous

Assessment

Something is moving through the trees
in the night outside –
is it the wind? is it something?

nothing?
And above in the spreading branches
fringed with black leaves –
what is it in the night's
silent disturbance
that the ear, the mind, the heart receives?

The bright September moon shines through.
(What am I doing here, what will I ever do?)

Down in the street below the truck for the dumpster
is just getting through
hauling away the trash;
traffic jars past on the busy street off a ways.
I remember so little, yet so much,
of my early, middle and later nights and days.
I have only bad memories.
And though frequently laughed at, and with,
I was never loved.

Assessment II

Blue green moonlight with its shadow-veins

leaf pages blowing,
leaf hands catching at them

at the corner of the room
near the window so open now

but within the sky's waters –
which are the wind,
which are the moonlight

there is dream, and the source of dream
floating in the surface, deep in the surface
of the moonlit floor
shadows floating in it like flowers in a bowl

and wind shapes touch mind corners
and mind centers as well –

heart waking, not waking
crying aloud to wake,
asleep

again and again

Dip your face past the deep well,
mirror surface of night

When will you be whole, with the amulet of fire around you,
wipe your face free of the ash? –

burnt pages of the dream

Autumn Night with Heavy Rain and Full Moon

Wind-swirling tree knifed through
with a seething –
slashes of the rain,
collapsing dented tree sails luffing
about to blow –
branches taut stretching and shaking

olive gray undersides of the leaves suddenly luminous,
as they are shed about
and the road is bone white
in the moonlight

Starkly illuminated framework of the tree
gray and recessed
amid lightning's spotlight

Above the wind,
there are coal smoke pillars
diaphanous violet petal cumuli
of storm clouds

Thrown the switch now –
electric current of denser rain –
lightning phosphorous again
and a flare is lit inside the tree

Ozone scent like gun smoke
of a broken apart world

but there is more wind now,
and a rain curtain veils the scene in grainy
granuled sepia

Incantation

Moon

earth-tree
branches
speaking loud the night wind
leaf
listening whisper past night water

brightened now,
peaceful

anticipating death

The water streams

yet only one place sleeping waking know

echoes earth sun moon

Moonflower lichen on rock
in the blue green light
near the pine tree

There bent over in rain,
the paper-colored grass

White blue, full of snow,
swiped feather-clouds

Stones of silver, gold grains of charmed sands,
glints of purple light
wavering spirit minnow moon flecks,
moon sun-sparkle
the pool black and still
chained with spots of mercury and gold

cloudless sky, star-figured fires
and our silence

far in the ascending, in anticipation

Late October

Sky depth and
the moon –
the grass world here below
rainy and wet

night misting chill on the pond

and the lens of the air all around misting –
a frosty steam near the moon's whited face

see amethyst webs
in a pine tree's moonlit weft,
see the still half laden boughs of leaves and fruit
on crab apple trees in the field,
the prayer-beaded and rain-pocked oak clusters
hanging still,
feel frost-browned grass now chill and hollow-stiff
and wet underfoot

See up into the night-well, deep,
looking up into it so high –
dark leaves fringe the walls that are barreled around my gaze,
the leaves' swaying pulse in breezes
of the storm yet coming,
and there will be winds –
though still only breezes as yet –
the cold autumn storms
felt all around preparing

A Winter Day

Snow scarves loosed to mid day's freezing light
(Though all dark bindings and discovered prints
Had steeped in small bright wells their waxen threads)
Lay down new cloaks to earth, papered, starlit.

Yet leaves of the hierophant and pythoness
In rising vortexes of cicadas' blue
Conceal a discord, manifold yet true,
Stark radiance of waking into brightest plains.

Dim and decisive day – they flee from me,
Theft of the arching timepiece, these possessions:
Streams of these ashen scars, flowing quite free,

Bleed a resplendent graphite from my veins –
Splinters of light held in the bright sun mirror,
There where I greet the shadow's overture.

Renewal

Cold rain in April –
my birthday is drawing near;
I am moving into a new apartment,
this one already half bare

The clouds so bright in the sky,
the cold sky of a spring midday:
deep, deep blue straight up above
but whiter toward the low edge

Space and light – space, light, and time!
What is the nature of change?
How much I have undergone, how much has slipped away

Yet I hold it all in myself

I am glad, glad, glad
to have survived thus far,
this strenuous arduous life – and many dangers too –
having passed through

What have I now passed into? –
an extra realm of blue,
of clear sky, high and gold and such light-burnished clouds,
cold clean air – clear, bright

It is not the cold air of autumn,
instead it is the air of a very cold spring

There is a scoured freshness to the face of the earth itself,

there is a brightness to everything

The Determined Life

Before the dark and the cold chill morning rain
and the smoke-colored cloud banks

over the dark hill,

before the cold wind and the seething rain storm

floods through the raked and runneled trees,

there is a moment like a door opening,
there is a time of the poised forces around
as the earth is spinning.

Walking out, rain lancing across the green fields
in silver threads, in white-gray threads –
I certainly should be inside –
and there is thunder and a mist has covered the hill's shoulders,
only a corner epaulet just visible
as it is floating back into the gray,

The mud green field is sunk beneath a fog-like scarf and the rain boils up through
pock marking it and at moments is whisked away
by wind yanking like an impresario,
and there is more thunder and within it, like a cannister broken open,
there is a pouring down white hail the size of pepper corns –

And I am walking and gathering all of them,
I will gather up all of them and take them,
and the veil mist, and the acid stinging cold rain,
and the cold wet mud inside my shoes
and the green flecks of grass left on them, and the wind.

Hot Afternoon in the Field

Once again,
and the afternoon a drift of sounds –
around, but tiny, distant –
somewhere off beyond the empty stretch of field,
and my eyes are closed beneath the searching bright
hot sun.

I feel it on my face and in the core of my eye itself
– my right eye since my left is covered by
that forearm –
and the sun's warmth tingles in the roots of my hair,
my scalp tightens, pulls and itches –
it's as if that part of my head is simmering,
and my chest is filled with a calm quiet warmth
below its surface heat and pin pricks,
my breathing very much slowed.

There is an invitation in the light itself,
'come up' it seems to say,
'come up' and yet 'stay there, stay still.'
And there's a steady but very un-insistent throb –
but where? –
somewhere in my blood itself perhaps
or in the distant depth of light
or in the baking air.

Now I see with my whole face without sight
the fostering and yet incisive
trance of light,
entrance of light,
building yet burning the grass, the leaves of the trees,
everything on the surface of the field,
the near and the far hill.

I am a rock, a piece of broken-off stone,
a gathered bale of grass drying into hay,
under the life-engendering

and yet unliving heat of day,

Life itself within me yet apart, near as breath itself,
the beating of the heart,
yet distant as the pulsating resonance of sun
that seethes within the luminous dark pulp of a closed eye,
part of my own nature and yet strange,

unchanging as the solid unmoving depth of earth itself,
and yet itself change.
Life is the apparent – felt, seen, known all around,
heard in silence even; and yet
in the moving stillness, still enigma, mystery.

Elsewhere

Dark room with the night wind moving silently through,
somewhere in curtains, just past the sill –
the moon, the stars

There through the window
the trees move without cease
going nowhere in the wind

a sidewalk's pavement squares
looking like praline and chalk
in the moon's autumn light
in the blue street light

walkers passing down on the street below
see them as stair steps
leading on somewhere
to where?

And a face might be suddenly there
in the leaves,
just as quickly disappear,
seen but once

How often one thinks, and then thinks again –
what do I know, where have I been? –
images of times places
faces that glint quick and small
in a dark confusion of lights,
bright dim shapes of shadows there on the wall

where have I been, where am I going?

elsewhere

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

STEVEN FRATTALI is an American writer living in Taipei and Boston. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* (ELS,2002) and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism.* (Peter Lang, 2005)